

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6098
INFO SECDEF WASHDC
AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG
AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE
USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER
CINCUSAREUR HEIDELBERG GER
USNMR SHAPE
USMISSION USNATO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BRUSSELS 07605

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, BE
SUBJECT: THE ROLE OF THE BELGIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY IN
DECISION MAKING ON POLITICO-MILITARY TOPICS.

REF: BRUSSELS 6076

1. IN THE REFTEL WE OUTLINED SOME OF THE REASONS
PECULIAR TO BELGIUM AND TO THE BELGIAN GOVERNMENT AT
THIS PERIOD IN ITS HISTORY FOR DELAYS IN RESPONDING
TO U.S. REQUESTS OR PROJECTS OF A POLITICO-MILITARY
NATURE, E.G. ERW, HAWK-HELIP, AWACS, SHAPE-EUCOM
COLLOCATION, JOINT STORAGE SITES, NATO LTDP, AND
STDPS.

2. ON ALL OF THESE SUBJECTS, THE FOREIGN MINISTRY HAS
BEEN THE EMBASSY'S PRINCIPAL INTERLOCUTOR ON THE
BELGIAN GOVERNMENT SIDE, DESPITE THE FACT THAT THESE
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ISSUES ARE OFTEN OF A MILITARY NATURE IN THE U.S.
CONTEXT. IT MIGHT APPEAR THAT WE COULD GET QUICKER
OR BETTER RESULTS BY DEALING DIRECTLY WITH OTHER
MINISTRIES OR POLITICIANS. GIVEN THE ROLE OF THE
FOREIGN MINISTRY IN THE BELGIAN GOVERNMENT, THESE
OPTIONS ARE NOT EFFECTIVELY OPEN TO US. WE DESCRIBE
WHY BELOW.

3. IN ALL MAJOR FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES, THE FOREIGN MINISTRY IS THE PRINCIPAL ACTION AGENCY. IT IS MORE THAN A FIRST AMONG EQUAL MINISTRIES. IN SOME QUESTIONS, THE FOREIGN MINISTRY'S VOICE IS CONTROLLING IN EITHER DECIDING ON ACTION OR MOVING AN ISSUE TO THE CABINET. THESE ARE MATTERS OF A PURELY POLICY NATURE (E.G. THE ARMS EMBARGO TO SOUTH AFRICA, CONCERN OVER THE EFFECT OF THE CYPRUS ISSUE ON NATO). THERE ARE, HOWEVER, THREE OTHER ROLES UNDERTAKEN BY THE FOREIGN MINISTRY, WHICH ARE LESS OBVIOUS TO EXTERNAL OBSERVERS:

A) IN FOREIGN-POLICY MATTERS OF BROAD IMPORT, THE MFA IS TASKED WITH COLLATING AND DIGESTING THE PAROCHIAL OPINIONS OF OTHER MINISTRIES (E.G., DEFENSE, ECONOMIC AFFAIRS), NONE OF WHICH HAVE AN OFFICE TO APPRAISE FOREIGN POLICY ASPECTS OF POLICY ISSUES. THE DEFENSE MINISTRY DOES NOT HAVE THE EQUIVALENT OF DOD'S INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS ACTIVITY.

B) THE FOREIGN MINISTRY PREPARES THE GREAT BULK OF PARLIAMENTARY PRESENTATIONS AND THE FOREIGN MINISTER HANDLES MOST PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONING ON FOREIGN POLICY RELATED ISSUES. THE FOREIGN MINISTRY DOES NOT HAVE AN OFFICE FOR PARLIAMENTARY RELATIONS; INDIVIDUAL

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SUBSTANTIVE OFFICERS MUST DO THIS WORK. PARLIAMENT AS AN INSTITUTION DOES NOT HAVE PROFESSIONAL COMMITTEE STAFFS NOR DO INDIVIDUAL DEPUTIES AND SENATORS HAVE PERSONAL STAFFS OR LEGISLATIVE ASSISTANTS. WHAT U.S. CONGRESSIONAL STAFFS OR LEGISLATIVE ASSISTANTS DO IN THE U.S. ON FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES, IS IN BELGIUM DIVIDED BETWEEN THE FOREIGN MINISTRY AND THE RESEARCH STAFFS OF THE INDIVIDUAL POLITICAL PARTIES. THE LATTER DECIDE, BASED IN PART ON MATERIAL PROVIDED BY THE FOREIGN MINISTRY TO PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES, HOW THE DEPUTIES AND SENATORS SHOULD VOTE. PARTY DISCIPLINE IS NORMALLY ADHERED TO RIGOROUSLY.

C) THE FOREIGN MINISTRY MUST, LASTLY, ASSESS THE STATE OF BELGIAN PUBLIC OPINION ON ISSUES OF INTERNATIONAL IMPORT AND ADVISE THE GOVERNMENT ON TACTICS AND TIMING IN HANDLING PENDING ISSUES. IT PERFORMS THIS TASK PRIMARILY BY ANALYZING THE POSITIONS TAKEN ON AN ISSUE BY THE COALITION PARTIES (INCLUDING INTRA-PARTY BACKGROUND DISCUSSION) AND FORMULATING TACTICAL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE FOREIGN MINISTER. THE LATTER REFLECTS THE VIEWS OF HIS

ADVISORS WHEN CONFERRING WITH COALITION PARTY LEADERS,
IN DELIBERATIONS OF THE FULL CABINET (OR A CABINET
COMMITTEE) AND IN PARLIAMENT.

4. THE FOREIGN MINISTRY IS HIGHLY CONSCIOUS OF ITS
LEADING ROLE, EVEN ON ISSUES WE INITIALLY RAISED WITH
IT ON BEHALF OF DOD, USNATO, OR THE US ARMED FORCES.
OUR EXPERIENCE INDICATES THAT MFA'S COORDINATION WITH
OTHER MINISTRIES IS FAST AND THOROUGH. THE MINISTRY
IS NOT PAROCHIAL IN KEEPING TO ITSELF ISSUES OF A
TECHNICAL NATURE BETTER HANDLED BY OTHERS (E.G., HAWK
MOU NEGOTIATIONS AND COMPASS COPE BRIEFINGS), BUT IT

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IS INCLINED TO INSIST ON OUR DEALING WITH MFA ON
ISSUES WITH HEAVY POLICY OR POLITICAL CONTENT.

5. THE FOREIGN MINISTRY SUFFERS FROM LACK OF ADEQUATE
STAFFING TO PRODUCE THE VOLUME OF WORK IT MUST. THIS
PROBLEM DATES BACK TO PERSONNEL DECISIONS IN THE
1960'S. WHEN PAUL-HENRI SPAAK WAS FOREIGN MINISTER
IN THE EARLY 1960'S, THE FAYAT REFORMS WEEDED OUT A
LARGE NUMBER OF MIDDLE GRADE OFFICERS FOR LINGUISTIC
REASONS (75 BRUSSELS - A247). DURING THE HARMEL
MINISTRY IN THE MID-1960S, A DECISION WAS TAKEN TO
LIMIT INTAKE OF JUNIOR OFFICERS TO 14 PER YEAR.

THE IMPACT OF THESE DECISIONS IS NOW BEING FELT AT HOME AND ABROAD. DESPITE THE SHORTAGE OF PERSONNEL, THE MFA HAS RECENTLY MOVED TO AUGMENT ITS NATO AFFAIRS SECTION BY TWO OFFICERS (ONE OF WHOM IS IN PLACE) TO A TOTAL OF FIVE. THIS SECTION HAS THE ACTION ON ALL ISSUES LISTED IN PARA 1 ABOVE AS WELL AS

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ON ALL OTHER NATO-RELATED ISSUES. WE HAVE ALSO BEEN TOLD THAT THE BELGIAN DELEGATION TO NATO WILL SOON BE AUGMENTED BY ONE OFFICER.

6. IN CONCLUSION, WE SEE NO EFFECTIVE ALTERNATIVE TO CONTINUING TO DEAL WITH THE FOREIGN MINISTRY, AT LEAST INITIALLY, ON MOST POLITICO-MILITARY ISSUES. CHAMBERS

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